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AUTHOR Etaugh, Claire; Riley, Sue
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ABSTRACT

Findings that job applicants who are married and childless are evaluated more favorably than applicants who are single and have a child have serious implications for the growing number of single female heads of households. This study examines how evaluations of competence are affected by marital and parental status when males and females apply for "sex-appropriate" or "sex-inappropriate" jobs. Male (N=80) and female (N=80) subjects received a booklet containing a completed job application and a letter written by the applicant. Booklets varied with respect to occupation, sex, marital and parental status of the applicant. Subjects evaluated applicant competence and merits of the letter. Evaluations of job applicant competence are influenced by a complex interaction among variables of applicant sex, marital status, parental status and sex-typing of the job. Females applying for feminine jobs were rated as higher in status and more professionally competent than females applying for masculine jobs or males applying for feminine jobs. Females received better ratings than males, suggesting a rater bias in favor of females, especially among female raters. Childless applicants were not evaluated more favorably than those with children. Future research should focus on the evaluations of employers in hiring and salary benefits. (NRB)

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Evaluating Competence: Effects of Marital and Parental Status and Occupational Sex-Typing

Claire Etaugh and Sue Riley
Bradley University

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Evaluating Competence: Effects of Marital and Parental Status and Occupational Sex-Typing

Considerable evidence exists indicating that women often are judged to be less competent than men with equal qualifications and accomplishments (e.g., Etaugh & Rose; 1974; Goldberg, 1968; Mischel, 1974; Piacente, Penner, Hawkins, & Cohen, 1974).

A number of variables influence such ratings of competence. One of these is the sex-typing of the task or occupation. Female applicants have been evaluated more favorably than male applicants for predominantly female jobs, whereas male applicants have received better ratings than female applicants for predominantly male positions (Cash, Gillen & Burns, 1977; Cohen & Bunker, 1975). Similarly, articles on typical feminine topics have been judged more favorably when attributed to female authors than to male authors, while articles on typically masculine topics have been given better evaluations when attributed to male writers than to female writers (Mischel, 1974).

A recent study (Etaugh & Kasley, in press) indicates that the perceived competence of female and male job applicants also is influenced by their marital and parental status. While females were judged to be less competent than males regardless of marital and parental status, applicants of both sexes who were married and childless were evaluated more favorably than applicants who were single and had a child. These findings potentially have serious implications for the growing number of single female heads of household in this country (U.S. Bureau of the

Census, 1979). Before firm conclusions can be drawn from these results, however, their reliability and generalizability to other situations needs to be determined. For example, while the applicants in the study by Etaugh and Kasley were applying for a non-sex-typed job, sex-segregation in occupations still is the norm (e.g., Blau, 1979). The present study examined how evaluations of competence are affected by marital and parental status when females and males apply for either "sex-appropriate" or "sex-inappropriate" jobs.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 80 female and 80 male college students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a medium-sized, private midwestern university.

Development of the Job Application

A pilot study was conducted in order to select female and male sex-stereotyped occupations of comparable status. Subjects in the pilot study were 30 college students enrolled in a junior-level psychology course at the same university. The pilot subjects were given a list of the following ten college majors: accounting, automotive and power, construction, elementary education, geology, home economics, music, nursing, physical education, and speech and hearing sciences. Subjects were asked to rate these majors on a masculinity-femininity scale ranging from 1 (very feminine) to 5 (very masculine) and on a status scale ranging from 1 (low status) to 5 (high status). Nursing

and accounting were selected as the sex-typed occupations for the main experiment because they were rated as feminine ($\bar{X}$=1.24) and masculine ($\bar{X}$=3.86), respectively, and were perceived to be of equal status ($\bar{X}$=4.10).

Procedure

Subjects were told that the study concerned the prediction of job success from information contained on an employment application. Each subject received a booklet containing a completed job application and a letter written by the applicant.

In half the booklets, the applicant was applying for a teaching position at a junior college in the department of accounting, and in half the teaching position was at a junior college in the department of nursing. Half the applicants for each position were described as females, and half as males. Within each occupation, half the applicants of each sex were described as married and half as single (a category including single, widowed, and divorced). Half the applicants in each of the two marital status categories were described as having a child, and half as having no children. All other information (address, birthdate, educational background, and employment history) were the same for all applicants. Each of the 16 different types of booklets (varying with respect to the occupation, sex, marital status and parental status of the applicant) was distributed to five female and five male subjects.

After reading the applicant's letter and application, the subjects answered seven evaluative questions by assigning letter

grades ranging from A (superior) through F (inferior). Four of the questions evaluated the competence of the applicant (professional competence, status in the field, future job success, professional dedication) and three spceifically evaluated the merits of the letter (writing style, extent to which the letter persuaded the reader that the applicant should be hired, overall grade). The author's first name was included in each question. After the evaluative questions were answered, the booklets were collected and a series of five multiple-choice questions was distributed in order to check whether subjects had attended to the critical (i.e. manipulated) items in the application. All of the subjects answered the questions correctly.

Results

The letter grades A through F were assigned numerical values of one through five, respectively. Thus, lower scores indicate more favorable evaluations. The scores for each question were subjected to a 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 (Sex of Subject x Sex of Applicant x Marital Status of Applicant x Parental Status of Applicant x Sex-Typing of Occupation) analysis of variance. Degrees of freedom were 1,131 for all main effects and interactions. Comparisons among means for significant interactions were made with Tukey's honestly significant difference test. (See Table 1 for means and standard deviations)

Four of the seven questions yielded significant interactions involving either the appllicant's sex and the sex-typing of the occupation or the applicant's sex and marital status

and the sex-typing of the occupation. In each instance, the most favorable evaluation was given to females, particularly single ones, who were applying for the feminine position.

Females applying for the feminine job were rated as more professionally competent ($\bar{X}$ = 1.93) than either females applying for the masculine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.28) or males applying for the feminine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.18), as indicated by the significant Sex of Applicant X Sex-Typing of Occupation interaction, F = 4.45, p < .037. Similarly, female applicants for the feminine position were judged to have higher status ($\bar{X}$ = 2.15) than either female applicants for the masculine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.45) or male applicants for the feminine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.43), as shown by the significant Sex of Applicant x Sex-Typing of Occupation interaction for that question, F = 4.57, p < .034. The significant Sex of Applicant x Marital Status x Sex-Typing of Occupation x Sex of Subject interaction, F = 5.79, p < .018, indicated that the highest status ratings were given by female subjects to single female applicants for the feminine job ($\bar{X}$ = 1.80), whereas significantly lower ratings were given by female subjects to single male applicants for both the feminine job ($\bar{X}$ 2.50) and the masculine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.50), and by male subjects to married male applicants for the feminine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.50) and to married female applicants for the masculine job ($\bar{X}$ = 2.70).

A significant Sex of Applicant x Sex-Typing of Occupation interaction, F = 4.24, p < .042, revealed that females applying for the feminine position were judged to be more dedicated ($\bar{X}$ = 1.77) than males applying for the feminine position ($\bar{X}$ = 2.15).

This effect was found primarily for single applicants, as indicated by the significant Sex of Applicant x Marital Status x Sex-Typing of Occupation interaction, $F = 4.24$, $p < .042$. Single females in the feminine occupation were considered more dedicated ($\bar{X} = 1.60$) than single males in the feminine occupation ($\bar{X} = 2.40$). Married applicants received similar ratings on this question regardless of their sex and occupation.

A significant Sex of Applicant x Marital Status x Sex-Typing of Occupation interaction, $F = 6.13$, $p < .015$, also was found for the grade assigned to the applicant's letter. Single female applicants for the feminine job were judged to have written a better letter ($\bar{X} = 2.15$) than either single male applicants for the feminine job ($\bar{X} = 2.90$) or married male applicants for the masculine job ($\bar{X} = 2.95$).

The questions concerning writing style and predicted job success yielded significant interactions involving marital status and parental status. Among applicants with no children, single persons were judged to have better writing style ($\bar{X} = 2.38$) than married persons ($\bar{X} = 2.78$), $F = 4.09$, $p < .045$. No differences in writing style were perceived between married and single applicants who had a child.

Predictions of job success were less favorable for single men ($\bar{X} = 2.35$) than for married men ($\bar{X} = 2.00$), single women ($\bar{X} = 2.05$), or married women ($\bar{X} = 2.10$), as indicated by the significant Sex of Applicant x Marital Status interaction, $F = 4.45$, $p < .037$. The significant Sex of Applicant x Marital

Status x Sex of Subject interaction, $F = 5.03$, $p < .019$, further shows that the most favorable predictions of job success were those made by female subjects for single women ($\bar{X} = 1.80$) and married men ($\bar{X} = 1.90$), while the least favorable predictions were made by male subjects for single women ($\bar{X} = 2.30$) and single men ($\bar{X} = 2.30$), and by female subjects for single men ($\bar{X} = 2.40$). The significant Marital Status x Parental Status x Sex of Subject interaction for this question, $F = 4.45$, $p < .037$, indicates that the most favorable predictions were made by female subjects for married applicants without children ($\bar{X} = 1.90$) and by male subjects for married applicants with children ($\bar{X} = 1.90$). Significantly less favorable predictions were made by male subjects for single applicants with children ($\bar{X} = 2.35$).

Discussion

The results indicate that evaluations of the competence of job applicants are influenced by complex interactions among the variables of the applicant's sex, marital status, and parental status, and the sex-typing of the job. In line with previous research (Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Mischel, 1974; Panek, Deitchman, Burkholder, Speroff, & Haude, 1976), females were evaluated more favorably when applying for a feminine job than for a masculine job. Specifically, female applicants for the feminine position were rated as more professionally competent and as having higher status than female applicants for the masculine position. This was especially true for single females,

When applying for the feminine job, single females were judged by female subjects to have the highest status of any group of applicants, and were judged by both sexes to be the most dedicated and to have written the best letter.

Also in agreement with earlier findings (Cash et al, 1977; Mischel, 1974; Muchinsky & Harris, 1977), female applicants for the feminine job received better ratings than did male applicants for the same job. In particular, the female applicants were judged to be more professionally competent and to have higher status and greater professional dedication than the male applicants.

Thus, the results for females are in line with previous evidence that individuals in sex-appropriate fields are perceived as more competent than those in sex-inappropriate fields. The pattern of results for males was somewhat different. Like females, males in a sex-inappropriate job were devalued. However, male applicants for the masculine job were not rated more favorably than female applicants for that job. Further, the female applicants for the feminine job received better ratings than the male applicants for the male job on every question, although this difference reached significance only when assigning a grade to the applicant's letter. These results suggest a rater bias in favor of females. Several other recent studies have demonstrated a similar bias (Cline, Holmes, & Werner, 1977; Gruber & Gaebelein, 1979; Hough & Allen, 1975; Levenson, Burford, Bonno, & Davis, 1975; Mischel, 1974; Muchinsky & Harris, 1977; Peck,

1978). While subjects of both sexes in the present study showed a bias in favor of female applicants for the feminine job, female subjects showed even more profemale bias than male subjects, in line with previous research (Cline et al, 1977; Levenson et al, 1975; Peck, 1978). Female subjects predicted greater job success for single women than for single men whereas male subjects did not. In addition, the highest status rating for all groups of applicants was that assigned by female subjects to single women applying for the feminine job. It has been suggested (Muchinsky & Harris, 1977) that the rise of the women's movement has made it socially desirable to evaluate females more positively than males in an effort to compensate for past discrimination against women. Profemale expressions by females, in particular, have been interpreted as a display of support for the women's movement as well as an overreaction to the frequent devaluation of women (Hough & Allen, 1975).

Marital status was a particularly salient variable in judging female applicants for the feminine job. As noted earlier, the single female applicant was perceived as having the greatest dedication, the highest status, and the best-written letter. Marital status also was important in predicting job success for men, with greater success predicted for married than for single men. This finding is consistent with evidence that married male faculty members receive higher salaries than their single counterparts (Ferber & Loeb, 1973). In addition, male subjects predicted that married applicants with children would be more

successful than single applicants with children. Etaugh and Kasley (in press) similarly found that married job applicants were evaluated more favorably than single ones. Along the same lines, Astin and Bayer (1972) reported that being married and having children were positively related to making higher salaries in academia.

Parental status had little systematic effect on evaluations of competence. As indicated above, marital status influenced predictions of job success only when the applicant had a child (married applicants were rated more favorably than single ones), while marital status affected judgments of writing style only for applicants with no children (single applicants received better ratings than married ones). Contrary to the findings of Etaugh and Kasley (in press), there was no evidence that childless applicants were evaluated more favorably than those with a child.

To summarize, females, especially single ones, who applied for a sex-appropriate job generally were evaluated most favorably. Males, especially single ones, and females who applied for sex-inappropriate jobs generally were evaluated least favorably. Thus, while occupational sex-typing affected evaluations of competence, this variable was particularly salient in judging the performance of single job applicants. To the extent that these findings are representative of judgments made in actual employment settings, they indicate an evaluation bias which affects an expanding segment of the work force. Both women

and men are remaining unmarried for longer periods of time and are divorcing in increasing numbers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975). Thus, the labor force contains a growing number of single workers. Future research is needed to examine the applicability of these results to other settings and subject populations. An important focus of study should be the evaluations made by employers themselves in the context of decisions related both to hiring and to the allocation of rewards for performance.

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Footnote

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for All Conditions

Female Subjects

Ques. No.		Female Occupation								Male Occupation							
		Female Applicant				Male Applicant				Female Applicant				Male Applicant			
		Single		Married		Single		Married		Single		Married		Single		Married	
		Children				Children				Children				Children			
		0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
1	$\bar{X}$	1.80	1.80	2.00	2.40	1.80	2.60	1.80	2.40	2.20	2.40	2.20	2.40	2.20	2.00	2.00	2.40
	SD	.44	44	.63	.54	.44	.54	.83	.54	.83	.89	.54	.54	.83	.70	.00	.54
2	$\bar{X}$	1.80	1.80	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.60	2.20	2.40	2.40	2.20	2.60	2.20	2.40	2.60	2.20	2.60
	SD	.44	.83	.54	.54	.89	.54	.83	.54	.54	.83	.54	.83	.54	.54	.44	.54
3	$\bar{X}$	1.80	1.60	2.20	2.40	2.40	2.00	1.60	2.00	1.80	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.60	2.60	1.80	2.20
	SD	.44	.54	.83	.54	.89	.70	.54	.70	.83	.70	.70	.70	.54	.54	.83	.44
4	$\bar{X}$	1.20	1.60	2.40	2.00	2.40	2.20	1.80	1.80	2.20	1.80	2.20	2.20	1.80	2.00	2.20	1.80
	SD	.44	.54	1.14	1.22	.89	.83	.83	.83	.44	.83	.44	1.30	.83	.70	.83	.44
5	$\bar{X}$	2.00	2.60	3.00	2.60	2.80	2.60	2.60	3.00	2.00	2.80	2.80	2.40	2.40	2.80	3.00	2.80
	SD	1.00	.89	1.22	.54	.44	1.14	.89	.00	.70	.83	.83	1.67	.54	1.09	.70	1.09
6	$\bar{X}$	2.40	2.60	2.20	2.40	2.60	2.40	3.00	2.40	3.20	2.80	3.00	2.80	2.40	3.00	2.80	2.60
	SD	.54	.54	1.30	.89	1.67	.54	1.00	1.51	.83	1.30	.70	1.09	.89	.70	.83	.89
7	$\bar{X}$	1.80	2.20	2.40	2.80	2.80	2.60	2.20	2.60	2.20	2.60	2.20	2.40	2.60	2.80	3.20	2.80
	SD	.44	1.09	1.14	.44	.44	1.14	.83	.54	.83	.89	1.30	1.67	.54	1.09	.83	1.09

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Male Subjects

Ques. No.		Female Occupation								Male Occupation							
		Female Applicant				Male Applicant				Female Applicant				Male Applicant			
		Single		Married		Single		Married		Single		Married		Single		Married	
		Children				Children				Children				Children			
		0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
1	$\bar{X}$	1.80	1.80	2.00	1.80	2.00	2.20	2.40	2.20	2.00	2.40	2.40	2.20	2.00	1.80	2.20	2.40
	SD	.44	.44	.70	.44	1.00	.83	.54	.44	.00	.54	.54	.44	.70	.44	.44	.54
2	$\bar{X}$	2.60	2.20	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.80	2.60	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.80	2.60	2.40	2.40	2.00	2.00
	SD	.54	.44	.70	.00	.00	.83	.54	.54	.54	.54	.44	.54	.54	.89	.00	.00
3	$\bar{X}$	2.20	2.20	2.40	1.60	2.40	2.40	2.20	1.80	2.40	2.40	2.40	1.80	2.00	2.40	2.00	2.40
	SD	.44	.44	.54	.54	.54	.54	.44	.83	.54	.54	.54	.44	.00	.54	.00	.54
4	$\bar{X}$	2.00	1.60	2.00	1.40	2.60	2.40	1.80	2.20	2.00	2.00	2.20	1.60	1.60	1.60	2.00	2.00
	SD	.70	.54	1.00	.54	1.14	.89	.44	1.09	1.00	.70	.44	.54	.54	.54	1.00	.70
5	$\bar{X}$	2.00	2.80	2.60	2.20	2.60	3.40	2.40	2.40	3.00	2.40	3.20	2.00	2.20	2.40	2.60	2.80
	SD	1.22	1.09	.89	.83	1.14	1.14	.89	1.14	.70	.89	.44	.70	.83	1.14	1.14	.44
6	$\bar{X}$	2.40	2.60	2.80	3.00	2.40	3.60	2.20	2.00	3.00	2.80	3.20	2.40	2.40	3.00	2.60	3.40
	SD	.89	1.14	.83	1.00	.54	.89	1.09	.70	2.00	.44	.83	.89	.89	.70	.89	.54
7	$\bar{X}$	2.00	2.60	2.60	1.80	3.00	3.00	2.20	2.20	2.60	2.40	3.40	2.00	1.80	2.00	2.60	3.20
	SD	.70	.54	.54	.83	1.58	.70	.83	1.09	.89	.89	.89	.00	.83	1.00	1.14	.44

Note.- Questions: 1-applicant's professional competence; 2-applicant's professional status; 3-prediction of job success; 4-applicant's dedication; 5-writing style; 6-persuasiveness of letter; 7-grade assigned to letter.